



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# **Overcoming Challenges and Feeding Kids during a Pandemic**

**January 2021**

# CSDE 360

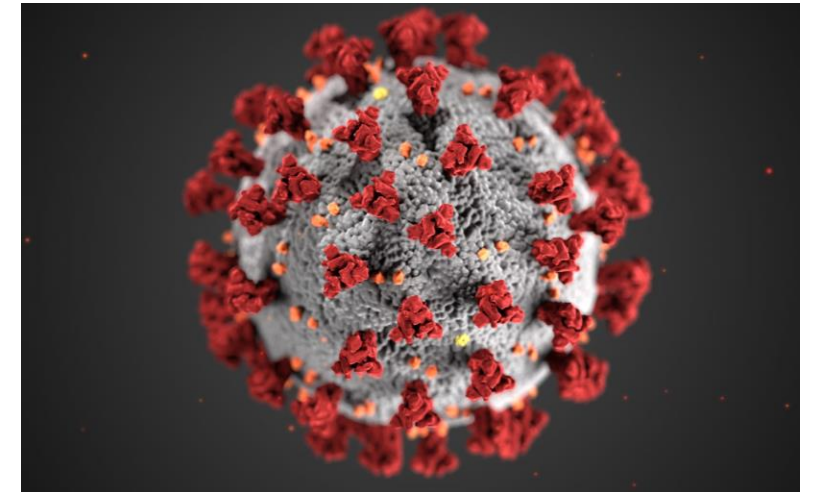
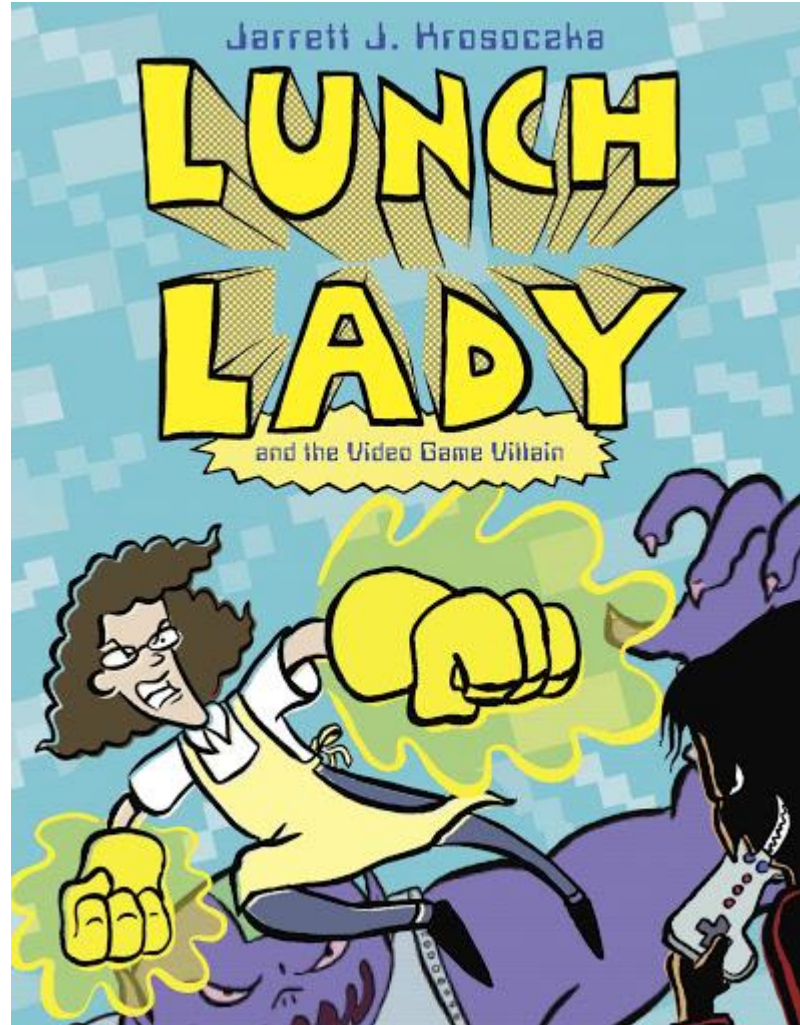


Photo Credits:

- <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20200427005364/en/Aramark-Salutes-School-Lunch-Heroes%C2%A0Provides-20-Million-Meals-to-Students-During-COVID-19-Crisis>
- <https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2013/04/28/school-lunch-lady-superhero-day/>



# What's New at the CSDE

- **U.S. Secretary of Education Nominee, Miguel Cardona**
- **Deputy Commissioners**
  - Charlene Russell-Tucker  
Educational Supports and Wellness
  - Desi Nesmith  
Academics and Innovation
- **School Lunch Tray Table Talk  
Fridays 9:00 – 9:30 AM**
  - Stay tuned for February and beyond editions!



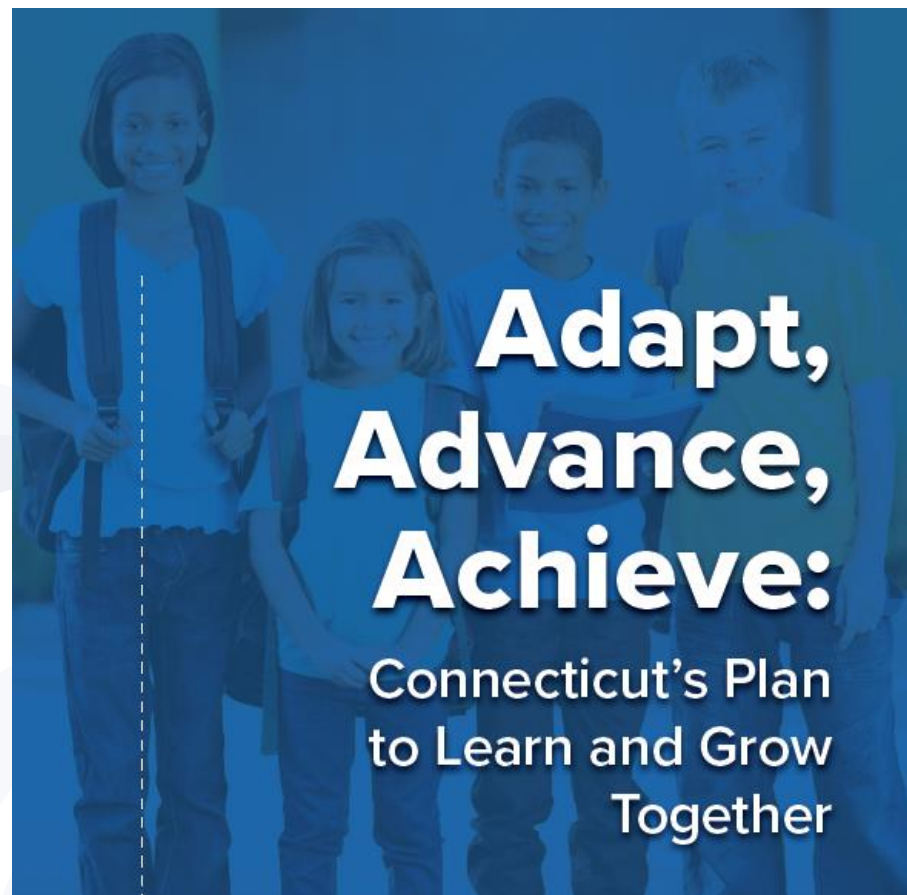
# What's New at the CSDE's Child Nutrition Unit

- **In process**
  - **Grants and Contracts Specialist – Child Nutrition Programs**
  - **Education Services Specialist – School Nutrition Programs**
  - **Education Services Specialist – Child and Adult Care Food Program**
  - **Education Support Technician – Child Nutrition Programs**





# Adapt, Advance, Achieve



## Addendum 13

**Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's  
Plan to Learn and Grow Together**  
Connecticut State Department of Education



### **Guidance and Considerations for School Nutrition Programs for School Year 2020–21**

### **Operation of Child Nutrition Programs during Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreaks**

Operating Child Nutrition Programs: School Year 2020-21

USDA Nationwide Waivers for School Year 2020-21

NSLP and SBP Sponsor Waiver Applications for School Year 2020-21

CSDE Waivers Submitted to USDA | P-EBT | COVID-19 Resources

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/COVID19/COVID-19-Resources-for-Families-and-Educators>



# Show Me the Money!

- **Executive Order 9K**
  - Healthy Food Certification
  - State Severe Need School Breakfast
- **Federal guidance pending**
  - CARES Act Continuing Resolution
  - State Match
  - Entitlements SY 2021-22 and 2022-23



# Federal Initiatives – Waivers

- **Waivers**
  - 71 nationwide waivers for CNPs to date
  - 3 Connecticut specific
- **Focus on SSO/SFSP/NSLP**
  - Non-congregate
  - Meal service times
  - Parent/guardian pick-up
  - Area eligibility
  - Offer versus serve
  - Meal pattern



# Federal Initiatives – Programs

- **USDA Farmers to Family Food Boxes**
- **Emergency Meals To You (eMTY)**
- **Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT)**
  - DSS, CSDE, LEAs
  - 2.0 coming soon...
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**





# Lessons Learned Spring 2020

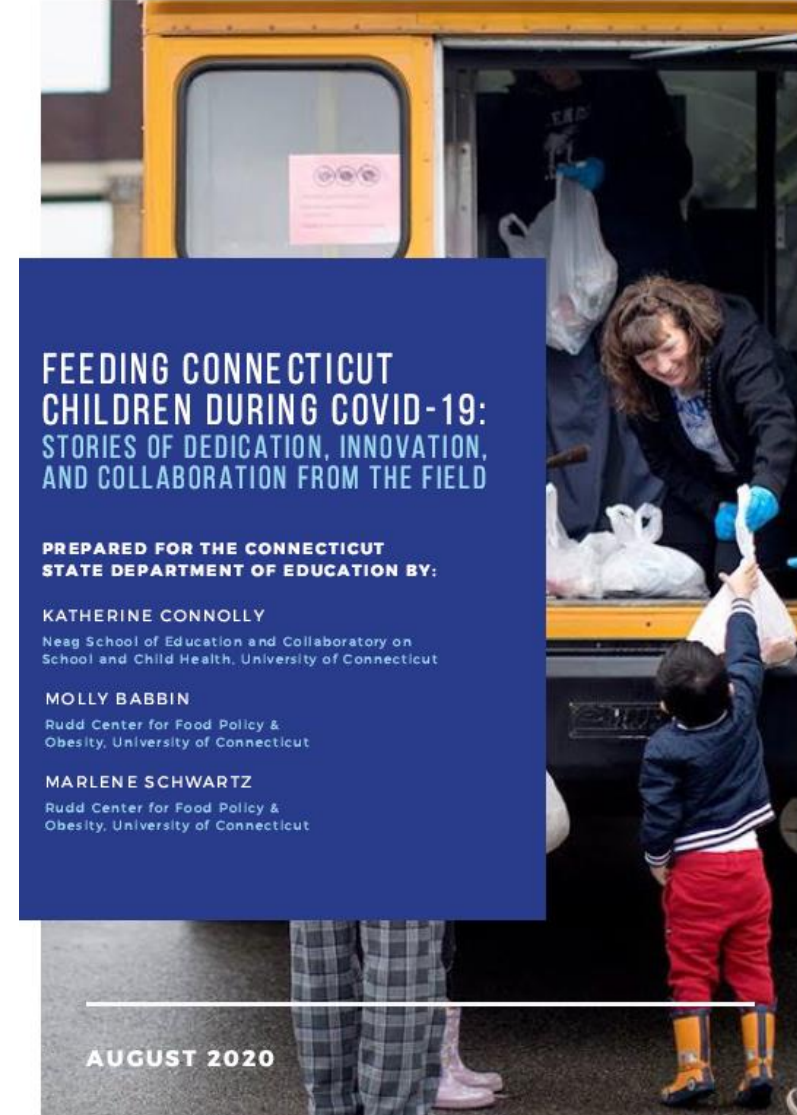
- **Feeding Connecticut Children During COVID-19: Stories of Dedication, Innovation, and Collaboration from the Field (August 2020)**
  - Katherine Connolly  
Neag School of Education and Collaboratory on School and Child Health, University of Connecticut
  - Molly Babbin  
Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, University of Connecticut
  - Marlene Schwartz  
Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, University of Connecticut
- ***Coming Soon: Dedication, Innovation, and Collaboration: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of School Meals in Connecticut During COVID-19 (2020-2058)***
  - Accepted for publication in the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/COVID-19/Feeding\\_CT\\_Children\\_during\\_COVID19\\_Rudd\\_Report.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/COVID-19/Feeding_CT_Children_during_COVID19_Rudd_Report.pdf)



# Lessons Learned Spring 2020

- Special thanks to
  - Cheshire Public Schools
  - Naugatuck Public Schools
  - New Milford Public Schools
  - Groton Public Schools
  - Thompson Public Schools
  - Ellington Public Schools
  - Norwalk Public Schools
  - Bridgeport Public Schools
  - Region 1 School District



# Lessons Learned Spring 2020: **Key Elements of Success**

- **Communication – external and internal**
- **Access**
- **Flexibility and creativity**
- **Involving school personnel beyond food service staff**
- **Community-based activities**
- **Including information beyond school meal distribution**
- **Collaborating with community organizations**



# Pandemic EBT

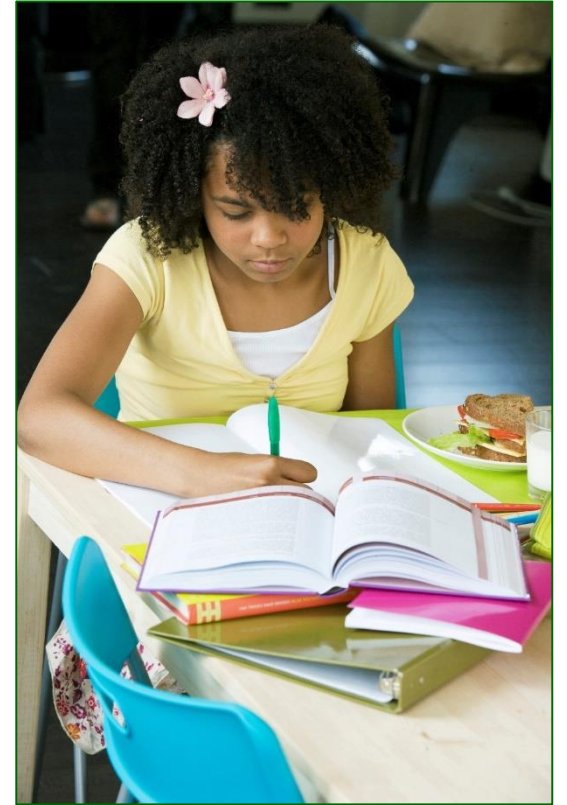
- **Version 1 – Families First Coronavirus Response Act**
  - Children eligible to receive free/reduced **NSLP** meals if not for school closure
    - Includes all students in CEP schools
    - 5 consecutive days
    - \$5.70 per day
      - \$105.7M total
  - 289,962
    - 287,743 public schools
    - 2,219 private schools
    - Approximately 195,200 households
  - Expired August 31, 2020
    - CT did not participate in September version





# Pandemic EBT 2.0

- **Version 2.0 – Continuing Resolution**
  - Extended through fiscal year 2021
  - Expanded
    - Includes reduced days or hours physically in school (or child care)
    - Simplifying assumptions to establish
      - benefit levels
      - eligibility periods
    - Child care – *pending USDA*
      - Facility closure
      - Reduced attendance or hours



# Administrative Reviews

- **Waiver Request for Administrative Reviews SY 2020-21**
  - NSLP including SSO
  - SFSP
  - Procurement
- **Alternative oversight and monitoring**
  - USDA accompanying at least 3 activities
- **More information available when plan is approved**



# Thank You CSDE CNP Unit

- Susan Alston\*
- Susan Boyle
- Fionnuala Brown\*
- Allison Calhoun-White
- Caroline Cooke
- Therese Dandeneau\*
- Susan Fiore
- Terese Maineri
- Benedict Onye
- Monica Pacheco
- Andy Paul
- Glenda Stuckey
- Elba Rivera
- John Frassinelli



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

## Current USDA Waivers for the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) for School Year 2020-21

- **Nationwide Waiver to Extend Area Eligibility Waivers** – Extension 3 (through June 30, 2021)
- **Meal Service Time:** Nationwide Waiver of Meal Service Time Restrictions in the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option – Extension 2 (through June 30, 2021)
- **Non-congregate Feeding:** Nationwide Waiver to Allow Non-congregate Feeding in the Summer Food Service Program – Extension 5 (through June 30, 2021)
- **Parent/Guardian Pick-up:** Nationwide Waiver to Allow Parents and Guardians to Pick Up Meals for Children – Extension 5 (through June 30, 2021)

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Child-Nutrition-Programs#CurrentWaiversNSLPSBP>





# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

Is outreach  
required for the  
SSO and SFSP?

Yes

- All SSO and SFSP sponsors must advertise the availability of meals in their community
- SFAs participating in the NSLP must conduct Summer Meals outreach



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations



Is outreach  
required for the  
SSO and SFSP?

**Yes**

## Outreach Opportunities

- Traditional and social media releases
- Webpage
- Town/organization/school newsletters
- Fliers/mailings
- Community posting boards
- Automated telephone calls



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

Who is eligible  
for the free  
meals?

Children

USDA defines “children” as

- persons 18 years of age and under
- persons 19 years of age or older who are determined by a state educational agency or a local public educational agency of a state to be mentally or physically handicapped and who participate in a public or nonprofit private school program established for the mentally or physically handicapped



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

At an open site/school,  
can sponsors feed only  
the students enrolled  
in the district?

**No**

- Sponsors must take necessary steps to allow meal service access *to all children requesting a meal at the site*
- Information regarding meal service must be publicized in the community served





# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

**Are sponsors  
required to  
train staff?**

**Yes**

- **General explanation of program**
- **Program duties and staff responsibilities**
- **Program purpose**
- **Site eligibility**
- **Site operations**
- **Recordkeeping requirements**
- **Meal pattern requirements**
- **Civil rights requirements**
- **SFSP: Duties of program monitors**



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

**Do the food safety and sanitation requirements apply during the pandemic?**

**Yes**

- **Review HACCP Food Safety Plan**
- **Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to cover alternate meal distribution methods**
- **Must maintain cold holding temperatures**
- **Must provide instructions for families regarding foods that require refrigeration or further preparation, e.g., reheating**



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

Are there monitoring requirements for the SSO and SFSP?

Yes

- SFAs are required to review each SSO site *at least once* during its operation
- SFAs must review the site's compliance with
  - meal counting
  - claiming
  - menu planning
  - food safety requirements



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

Is there a sample monitoring form for the SSO?

Yes

- The CSDE's sample form includes the required areas for SSO monitoring
- SSO sponsors may use their own monitoring form if it contains the same information

SSO Sponsor Monitor Site Review Form

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/SFSP/MonitorSSO.pdf>





# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

Does the SFSP have different monitoring requirements and a separate SFSP monitoring form template?

Yes

- **SFSP sponsors must conduct**
  - preoperational visit for each new meal site
  - first week visit for each meal site
  - full review for each meal site within the first four weeks of operations
  - “Thereafter, shall maintain a reasonable level of site monitoring” 7 CFR 225.15(d)(3)
- **All required monitoring topics are covered by CSDE’s SFSP monitoring forms**
  - <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Summer-Food-Service-Program/Apply#VisitCertification>



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

Are SFSP monitoring requirements currently impacted by USDA National Waivers?

Yes

## Two USDA National Waivers Impact SFSP Monitoring Requirements

- Nationwide Waiver to Waive First Week Site Visits – Extension 2 (through June 20, 2021)

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/covid-19-response-65>

*Applies to veteran meal sites that did not experience operational challenges in the preceding year*

- Nationwide Waiver of Onsite Monitoring Requirements for Sponsoring Organizations in the Summer Food Service Program – Extension 2 (through September 30, 2021)

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/covid-19-onsite-monitoring-requirements-sponsors-sfsp-extension-2>

*“...to ensure program integrity during this time, SFSP sponsoring organizations should, to the maximum extent practicable, continue monitoring activities of program operations offsite...”*



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

**What meal pattern requirements do SSO sponsors follow?**

- **SSO sponsors follow the NSLP and SBP meal patterns**
- **SFAs should make every effort to plan menus to meet the USDA meal pattern requirements based on the meal pattern for the predominate age group expected at each site**



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

What meal pattern requirements do SFSP sponsors follow?

- **SFSP Meal Pattern**
  - Targets ages 6-12
  - If larger or small portions are needed for younger or older participants, sponsors may request to use the CACFP meal pattern for children or CACFP adult meal pattern
- **Sponsors intending to implement Offer versus Serve (OVS) must notify CSDE consultant**

SFSP Meal Pattern

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/SFSP/MealPattern/SFSPMealPattern.pdf>

SFSP Meal Pattern Resources

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Summer-Food-Service-Program#MealPatterns>



# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

Are sponsors  
required to  
retain records?

**Yes**

- All records to support the claim shall be retained for a period of three years after the date of submission of the final claim for the fiscal year to which they pertain
- If audit findings have not been resolved, the records shall be retained beyond the end of the three years, as long as may be required for the resolution of the issues raised by the audit





# SSO and SFSP USDA Regulations

**Are sponsors  
required to retain  
records?**

**Yes**

**Sponsors must retain records to support the claim**

- **point-of-service meal counts**
- **menus**
- **production records**
- **approved waivers**



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

**Can sponsors schedule an evening distribution time to provide meals to families?**

**Yes**

- Allows working parents/guardians an alternate time to pick up meals outside of typical working hours
- For parents/guardians with children who have a structured distance learning day, allows a time outside of designated lunch time to pick up meals
- To add evening distribution hours, contact CSDE program consultant



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

**Can sponsors offer weekend meals and holiday meal to families?**

**Yes**

- **Meals provided can include**
  - meals for weekends
  - meals for holidays and school vacations
- **To add weekend meals, contact your CSDE program consultant**
- **Distribution of meals for 7 or more days requires prior CSDE approval**
  - Contact your CSDE program consultant



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

**Can sponsors  
operate a meal  
distribution site at  
the library or  
community  
center?**

**Yes**

- **Meal distribution sites can be located**
  - in central community locations, e.g., school parking lots, community centers, and libraries
  - along intersections along school bus routes
- **Site eligibility rules apply and additional applications may be required**
- **To add a community site, contact your CSDE program consultant**



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

**Can sponsors share their open site meal distribution dates and times with other schools and organizations in the community?**

**Yes**

- **Notifies students and families that do not attend a school participating in NSLP of the availability of SFSP or SSO meals at no cost**
- **Communicate meal distribution locations, dates, and times via web links, emails, and other communication channels**
- **Communicate distribution changes and ensure that websites are current**





# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

Can sponsors provide home delivery to families that have trouble accessing the meal distribution sites and times?

**Yes**

*(SFA sponsors only)*

- Must have a CSDE-approved *Application for Providing Home Delivery for SFSP or SSO Meals during School Year 2020-21*
- SFAs must obtain written consent from households of eligible children that the household wants to receive delivered meals



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

Can sponsors provide home delivery to families that have trouble accessing the meal distribution sites and times?

**Yes**

*(SFA sponsors only)*

- If using a private or public non-profit vendor or any other entity to deliver meals, must have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the vendor or third party concerning the confidentiality requirements
- To provide home delivery, contact your CSDE program consultant



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

**What should sponsors consider when deciding how many days' worth of meals to provide at a time?**

- **How long foods may be safely stored before eating**
- **How long foods can be stored before food quality suffers**
- **Participants' access to refrigeration and freezer space for the amounts of food and milk provided**



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

**What should sponsors consider when deciding how many days' worth of meals to provide at a time?**

- **Food storage space at the preparation or distribution site**
- **Whether fewer pick-up days and times will decrease access to meals for some children**



# Increasing SSO and SFSP Participation

**Are sponsors required to provide meal accommodations for children with disabilities?**

**Yes**

- SFAs must continue to provide reasonable modifications to program meals and the meal service to accommodate children with disabilities
- Work with parents to provide alternate meals as applicable and allowable, e.g., vegetarian options, approved nondairy milk substitutes, gluten-free items

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Special-Diets-in-School-Nutrition-Programs>





# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

**Can sponsors  
provide meals  
in bulk to  
families?**

**Yes**

- **With approved non-congregate feeding and meal times waivers, SFAs may provide bulk food items that contribute to multiple meals**
- **Provide menus and instructions with the foods to communicate to children and their parents or guardians how to portion and serve foods at mealtime**



# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

**What should sponsors consider when offering bulk food items to families?**

- **Parent/guardian time and availability to help prepare meals**
- **Age/developmental abilities of the children served**
- **Literacy level or primary language of families**



# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

**What should sponsors consider when offering bulk food items to families?**

- **Access to kitchen appliances and cooking tools, e.g., microwave, measuring cups**
- **Access to potable water**
- **Food safety risk of food**



# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

**What food items  
can sponsors  
provide in bulk?**

**Bulk foods can include foods that**

- **normally credit towards reimbursable meals in the SSO (NSLP) or SFSP meal pattern**
- **are recognizable as a meal component in a reimbursable meal**
- **do not require much preparation, or the addition of other ingredients, before eating**



# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

**Can sponsors  
provide frozen  
bulk foods?**

**Yes**

- Frozen foods that require minimal preparation (other than heating) may be provided as part of the meals if they meet meal pattern requirements
- Providing frozen foods may present a safe way to offer perishable foods for consumption later in the week, e.g., 4 or 5 days after distribution





# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

Should sponsors include a variety of food items when providing bulk meals to families?

**Yes**

- Providing a variety of foods can help children get important nutrients
- Try to balance the use of bulk foods while providing variety during the week



# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

**When providing multiple meals or meals in bulk, are sponsors required to document how the items contribute to the meal pattern?**

**Yes**

- **SFAs must continue to maintain documentation and production records that show the served meal components and quantities meet the applicable meals pattern**
- **SFAs must keep supporting menu documentation, such as labels, recipes, and manufacturer specifications in accordance with USDA regulations**



# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

**Should sponsors provide information to help parents/guardians identify which foods require refrigeration, cooking, or heating for food safety?**

**Yes**

- Label foods that require refrigeration or freezing
- Provide a list of foods that require refrigeration, freezing, and heating
- Sort foods into different bags prior to distribution (refrigerated, frozen shelf-stable)
- Plan menus that use perishable foods earlier in the week and frozen or shelf stable foods later in the week



# Bulk Meals in the SSO and SFSP

## Resources for Bulk Meals

- Summer Food Service Program: Providing Multiple Meals at a Time During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic  
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SFSP%20Bulk%20Foods%20Tip%20Sheet.pdf>
- Considerations for Providing Meal Components in Bulk Sizes at Non-congregate Meal Service Sites  
[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/COVID-19/Bulk\\_Foods\\_Considerations.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/COVID-19/Bulk_Foods_Considerations.pdf)



# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

**Can sponsors  
sell family meals  
to increase  
revenue?**

**Yes**

- **Consider providing take-out meals for families**
- **Target teachers and other adults who may not have time to go home and prepare a hot meal**
- **Consider meal kit concepts**



# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

Can sponsors  
serve family  
meals?

**Yes**

- Great way to market your programs
- Look at packaging
  - Is it appealing?
  - Would *you* want to receive the meal?
- Price meals accordingly
- Think outside the box
- Use decorative fliers  
<https://www.canva.com/>
- Make sure meal price covers all costs





# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

**Can sponsors  
expand a la  
carte sales?**

**Yes**

- **Consider expanding a la carte sales to adults/parents for take home**
  - Pie sales
  - Frozen cookie dough sales
  - Frozen bagels
  - Salads to go
  - Whole pizzas to go
  - Grinders to go
- **Work with your vendors**
- **Think outside the box**



# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

Should  
sponsors  
apply for  
grants?

**Yes**

- Great source of additional revenue
- Check out [www.google.com/alerts](https://www.google.com/alerts)
  - Enter key words, e.g., nutrition grants, school meal funding
- Get help from the community, e.g., local hospitals, banks
- Check local colleges and universities for help – team up!
- Utilize local resources, e.g., district grant writers



# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

- Might not be complicated
- Check it out before saying “I don’t have time”
- Have standard data ready to go
  - Enrollment
  - Free and reduced info
  - Stats
- Refer to SNA’s October 2020 digital School Nutrition publication, Embrace the Pivot



<https://editions.mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?i=675164&ver=html5>



# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

Are sponsors required to use the same menu that was used prior to COVID?

**No**

- Cycle menus
- Consider simplifying the menu (but not too simple! 😊)
- Survey students/parents for popular items
- Serve what students like
- Variety is important
- Make sure menu is marketed well



# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

**Is it important  
for sponsors to  
promote their  
programs during  
COVID?**

**Yes**

- **Review your website**
  - Is information easy to find?
  - Is the information up-to-date?
- **Is the requirement to pre-order meals cutting into your revenue?**
- **Review communications**
  - Are your fliers decorative and friendly?
- **Use social media**



# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

**Is it important  
for sponsors to  
promote their  
programs during  
COVID?**

**Yes**

- Use theme days for meals
- Take advantage of holidays to promote meals or special dinners (e.g., Super Bowl, Valentine's Day, Earth Day)
- In addition to promoting reimbursable meals, promote parent/teacher take-out meals





# Increasing Revenue during COVID-19

**Is it beneficial to be a member of the School Nutrition Association (SNA)?**

**Yes**

- **You are not alone!**
- **SNA membership can give you access to what other school nutrition programs are doing to handle COVID-19**
  - Great resources
  - Mentoring programs
  - Membership is an allowable school food service expense

<https://snact.org/>



***Thank you*** to Connecticut's child nutrition heroes!

